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ABSTRACT

This paper describes studies by Fonte (1993), Garrett (1992-93), and Ingram and Tollefson (1996) regarding state funding and control of community colleges. This article compares each of the three studies and contrasts the results. All research was based on questionnaires returned by 44 state directors of community colleges. Garrett concluded that state systems funded by more than 50 percent of state funds tend to have centralized governance structures, and those funded by local funds greater than 25 percent tend to have decentralized governance structures. Fonte's three primary conclusions were concerned with the effects of various state financial regulations on a college's ability to fulfill local needs for economic development, access, and "community resident programming." Ingram and Tollefson found that effective decision making in community colleges exists primarily at the local level. A table displays state shares of community college operating budgets, compared to state centralization of control, as perceived by each of the three studies. The article concludes that, based partly on the information provided by these studies, other political factors and traditions are more important determinants of state control over community colleges than the proportion of operating support provided by the state. (AS)

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August 29, 1997

The conventional wisdom in recent years has equated the proportion of community college funds appropriated by each state legislature with the proportion of state control over local community college decisions (Fonte, 1993). Studies by Garrett (1992 and 1993), Fonte (1993) and Ingram & Tollefson (1996) support the conventional wisdom, but with some qualifications

Garrett's studies (1992 and 1993) were based on completed questionnaires returned by 44 state directors of community colleges, and Fonte (1993) and Ingram & Tollefson (1996) used the same sources. Fonte received responses from 49 states, but published an analysis of only 19 large state community college systems. Garrett and Ingram & Tollefson developed weighted composite constructs of state centralization, but Fonte did not. Garrett and Ingram & Tollefson's studies employed numerical weights that permitted deriving rank orders, but Fonte grouped states into three categories (highest, mid-range and lowest in state control). Garrett's studies emphasized state statutory authority. Ingram & Tollefson employed the concept of effective decision-making authority, meaning the level at which decisions made were not usually reversed at a higher level. Fonte emphasized state financial regulations of community colleges. Garrett's 1993 study is used in this paper as the source of state shares of operating support.

Garrett (1993) concluded, "....state systems funded by more than 50% of state funds tend to have centralized governance structures, and state systems funded by local funds greater than 25% tend to have decentralized governance structures (pp. 12-13)."

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Fonte did not attempt to relate funding to control, except in citing the conclusions of earlier authors, but rather was more concerned with the effects of various state financial regulations on the colleges' ability to fulfill local needs for economic development, access and "community resident programming." His conclusions include the following:

- "...higher levels of Business Community Programming are achieved by states with the lowest levels of regulation (p. 8)."
- No significant relationships were found between degrees of state regulation and access or community resident programming (p. 11).
- "The study results suggest that at the very time that states are urging institutions to become major actors in economic development in their local customized training, they may be either establishing or maintaining fiscal regulatory policies that hamper close cooperation between local institutions and local businesses (p. 12)".

Ingram & Tollefson concluded:

- "The results of this study strongly indicate that heads of state community college systems perceive the location of effective decision making in community colleges in their states to be at the local level (p. 143)".
- "A possible explanation for differences between the results of this study and the suggestions in other studies that local governance authority is diminishing may be found in the distinction drawn here between *effective* decision-making authority and *formal* decision-making authority. These results may reflect an assumption in the operation of state community college systems that decisions are effectively

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made at the local level without regard for the final or formal decision-making agent. Leaders of state community college systems may perceive the role of the state agency as that of a 'rubber stamp', formally approving the decisions or actions of the local colleges (p. 148)".

The table below displays state shares of operating support for community colleges from Garrett (1993), and rank orders of state centralization indexes by Garrett (1992) and Ingram & Tollefson (1996), and high/medium/low categorizations of state financial regulatory control by Fonte (1993). Rank orders were derived from index numbers, and they pertain only to the 10 states for which case studies were written, plus Arizona, as shown in the left column of the table.

State Shares of Community College Operating Budgets Compared to State Centralization of Control

State	Garrett (1993)		Garrett (1992)	Ingram & Tollefson (1996)	Fonte (1993)
	State Share %	State Share Rank (N=10)	State Centralization Rank (N=10)	State Centralization Rank (N=10)	State Centralization Category (N=9)
Arizona	24.0	10	5	3	Low
California	77.5	3	4	9	Medium
Colorado	75.0	4	1	1	Medium
Florida	100.0	1	8	7	Medium
Michigan	38.7	6	10	10	Low
Nebraska	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	Low
New Jersey	28.0	8	6	2	N.A.
Oregon	30.0	7	9	8	Low
Texas	51.0	5	7	4	Low
Washington	90.0	2	3	6	High
Wisconsin	25.0	9	2	5	N.A.

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The table indicates some relationship between state share of community colleges operating support and the degree of state centralization of control, but by no means a perfect correlation. Arizona is depicted as a state system with more state control than might be expected based on the 24% state share of operating support. Michigan is shown with less state control than would be expected for a state with a 39% state share, and Florida community colleges appear to have much more local autonomy than would be expected in a system with no local operating support.

Based upon these studies and the 10 state case studies developed, it seems reasonable to conclude that other political factors and traditions, are more important determinants of state control of community colleges than the proportion of operating support provided by the state. Such factors include, but are not limited to, the type of state-level board, whether governors and legislators have confidence in community colleges regarding whether the community colleges are perceived as providing effective college transfer programs and, particularly, the degree to which community colleges are viewed as strong and efficient contributors to workforce training and economic development.

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